


Encouraging a thriving and diverse night-time economy



Preface

A vibrant and attractive night-time economy is important for many towns and cities across the UK. But it must be safe, well managed and welcoming for all members of the community. And a buzzing high-street atmosphere cannot be ruined by intimidating alcohol-related anti-social behaviour.

Getting the balance right is the challenge and finding innovative and cost-effective solutions the key. Schemes like safe spaces, which provide triage and pastoral care, take pressure off the police and emergency services, while vulnerability awareness training for frontline staff can prevent people becoming victims of crime or sexual harassment. Local investment in pedestrianised zones, feature lighting and special events all help to create great places for people to live, work and socialise.

A stylized, abstract illustration of a city skyline at night. The buildings are represented by dark, geometric shapes in various shades of blue and black. Small, glowing yellow and white squares are scattered across the buildings, representing windows or streetlights. The background is a gradient of dark blue and teal, with some lighter blue geometric shapes that suggest a sky or a cityscape.

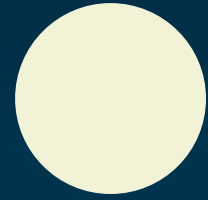
Drinks producers and retailers also play their part. They support Local Alcohol Partnership schemes, a range of business-funded initiatives that drive up standards in licensed premises, tackle underage drinking, reduce crime and anti-social behaviour and help to diversify the night time economy.¹

As the responsibility body for drinks producers, the Portman Group helps to co-ordinate the schemes and supports the Home Office's programme of Local Alcohol Action Areas created in the Modern Crime Prevention Strategy 2016.² An important element of this is to identify local best practice and experience of what works on the ground. We therefore wanted to explore how areas are working with local residents to set priorities for their local night-time economies (NTE) and to share their experience about creating a safe and thriving NTE with others.

We commissioned BritainThinks – one of the UK's leading insight and strategy consultancies – to work in-depth with two UK towns which have created dynamic, effective partnerships to tackle their own issues and create thriving and welcoming town centres. The output of this research is this report, and a practical toolkit for local authorities or any other organisations involved in developing their NTE and looking for ideas to engage with local stakeholders and residents.

We thank our partners in Exeter and Nottingham who gave their valuable time and expertise to this project, sharing their great examples of what works.

Sarah Hanratty
Deputy Chief Executive
Portman Group



1. Local Alcohol Partnerships are co-ordinated by the Portman Group and include schemes which can help local authorities and public health partnerships to tackle alcohol-related harm, reduce underage sales and proxy purchasing, and diversify their local night-time economies. The schemes are funded by drinks producers and retailers, and include Best Bar None, Community Alcohol Partnerships, Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS), Purple Flag and Pubwatch. Street Pastors also work closely with the group.

2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-crime-prevention-strategy>

Objectives and methodology

The Portman Group is interested in helping to reduce alcohol-related anti-social behaviour in towns and cities across the UK, and in supporting the growth of thriving and diverse local night-time economies (NTEs) in which all members of the local community can feel safe, welcome and proud.

To help realise this vision, the Portman Group commissioned BritainThinks to research what a good NTE looks like, what the barriers are to establishing this vision, and whose responsibility it is to deliver it.

Research locations



In September 2015, BritainThinks conducted research in Nottingham and Exeter. Nine members of the public took part in each city.

- 1 Nottingham
- 2 Exeter

Participants were recruited to include:



An equal number of men and women



A good mix of socio-economic groups



A mix of life stages



Varying degrees of engagement with the local NTE

In each city, BritainThinks conducted a focus group with participants, followed by a city-centre tour to observe the local NTE.

The following day, members of the public came together with local stakeholders in a half-day workshop. These stakeholders included representatives of local authorities (e.g. licensing managers), police officers, bar/club managers and street pastors. The public and stakeholders worked together to create a vision for a thriving NTE.

The findings were shared with national stakeholders at a strategic workshop to discuss the themes emerging and understand the key levers in delivering a safe and vibrant NTE.

To support local areas to conduct their own NTE research, the Portman Group has produced a toolkit, describing the research approach in detail and setting out a suggested agenda for the different elements.



Research immersion:
City centre tours and workshops with public and stakeholders

Overview of findings

BACKGROUND PERCEPTIONS

Despite improvements in safety, perceptions have not always caught up with reality

In both Nottingham and Exeter, members of the public and stakeholders felt that their cities are much safer now than they were 20 years ago.

“Things are infinitely better than they were 20 years ago. I remember walking down Union Street on a Saturday night – it was a riot. It has gotten so much better.”

– Stakeholder

However, despite this improvement, members of the public still perceive safety as a major barrier to participation in the night-time economy.

This was a cause of frustration among stakeholders, with some feeling that a negative media narrative is creating a perception barrier to inclusivity.

“You have thousands and thousands of visitors having a great time all year, and then there’s one serious incident and it’s all over the papers. And that perpetuates a certain perception of the city.”

– Stakeholder



Cities are safer:
Both research locations say safety has increased over the last 20 years

There has been a shift in city centres away from clubbing to a late-night pub culture

A move from clubbing to a late-night pub culture was identified by the public as one of the most significant shifts in the night-time economy in the last 20 years.

This was felt to have a significant impact on the dynamics of city centres, as drinkers are no longer contained in one location, but instead are dispersed throughout towns, including drinking on pavements. This was seen to increase the rowdiness of town centres and, for some, to make them intimidating places to be at night.

“You used to get people contained in clubs. They would go not just to drink but to dance. Now the bars spill out onto the pavement. If you’re trying to get somewhere it’s a problem.”

– Public



Late-night pub culture:
A shift away from club culture has seen pubs become late night venues

The NTE is strongly geared towards drinking, reducing inclusivity

The perceived focus of the NTE on drinking, and on specific groups within the community, was seen by the public to reduce inclusivity and cause tension.



Students:

Many venues cater exclusively to students during the week. This can exacerbate tensions between students and the rest of the local population.



Families:

Those with young children in particular are reluctant to take them to an area perceived to be focused on alcohol consumption. Furthermore, when they do take them to restaurants, they often feel that they are not welcome.



Teenagers:

There were felt to be very few venues or activities catering to teenagers. The public felt that this means that they do not learn how to engage responsibly in the NTE, storing up problems for when they become independent.

“There’s no families out at night. I took my grandson to a nice restaurant for dinner and just felt they didn’t like it. Everyone tuts sitting next to you, ‘Oh god, a child.’ That’s the culture.”

– Public

THE ADVANTAGES AND DOWNSIDES OF HAVING A SUCCESSFUL NTE

Both the public and stakeholders saw many benefits to having a thriving and diverse night-time economy.

- It boosts the local economy.
- It makes towns more attractive and exciting places to live.
- It can strengthen communities within towns by providing opportunities for people to meet and get to know each other.
- It can draw young people to towns, making them more dynamic.

“The night life affects how many people visit and the life of Nottingham and how it feels. My friends really enjoy coming here. That brings in money and makes the city a more interesting place.”

– Public

Despite agreement on these benefits, stakeholders recognised there could be downsides to the NTE in Nottingham and Exeter, such as:

- incidents of violence and disorder;
- pavements outside venues being taken over by large groups who have had a lot to drink;
- a lack of safe, reliable, affordable options to get home;
- a high number of homeless people coming into the town centre to take advantage of the NTE; and
- dark, dirty, empty streets.

Taken together, it was felt that these downsides tend to be more visible to the public, and lead some to feel that they are unsafe engaging in their local NTE.



Benefits of a thriving NTE:

A boost for the local economy and increased desirability of the area are just some of the benefits identified



Negatives of an NTE:

Dark, empty streets, violence and disorder are some of the downsides to a buzzing NTE

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

Drawing on the findings from across both locations, it is clear that a successful NTE is one with atmosphere and “buzz”.



However, to achieve buzz, towns must begin at the bottom of the pyramid, and build up. If the hygiene factor of a safe and clean environment is not firmly in place, efforts to make town centres attractive, diverse and unique will not succeed.

1 Create a safe, clean environment

Feeling unsafe, or not having confidence in the transport system, were the top barriers to participation in the NTE. To succeed in changing perceptions, schemes to address these barriers need to be visible and publicised. This is particularly important given the media focus on negative incidents.

For example, while local stakeholders in both Nottingham and Exeter felt that increased CCTV and schemes such as Purple Flag had done a lot to improve safety standards in the night-time economy, visible measures such as police patrols and taxi marshals are also important to the public and help them feel instantly safer.

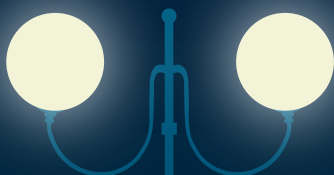
“Not everyone knows about the CCTV cameras. If we just had a policeman or woman out on the street I would feel safer.”

– Public

2 Create an attractive environment

A visually appealing place, especially one that is unique, can be a powerful draw to the town centre.

Even small initiatives to enhance the environment can deliver this. For example, the public valued lighting that highlights and celebrates local architecture, or schemes to transform open spaces into pleasant public areas through the use of greenery.



3 Attract a diverse crowd

Inter-generational mixing is key to creating a lively, relaxed atmosphere. To create the environment where this can happen, participants felt that the NTE must strike a balance between a drinking and non-drinking focus.

A strong club presence should be balanced out by initiatives to improve inclusivity; for example, craft activities in cafés, under-18 club nights and late-night coffee shops.

In such a context, teenagers can be exposed to the NTE in a controlled manner, and have the opportunity to learn to behave responsibly.

“Ideally, it would be mixed – families, old people, young people. But we have a culture of, ‘Get it down your neck and go wild,’ that’s the problem.”

– Public

4 Make it a unique and exciting offer

The NTE should be about showcasing the character and soul of a city or town. This will make it a draw not only for tourists, but also for locals, who will be able to consistently find new and exciting things to do in their area.

To deliver this, an NTE should build on the advantages of inclusivity to create a unique, buzzing atmosphere by re-imagining spaces and taking a dynamic approach to business. Examples might include late-night shopping, community markets, street entertainers and pop-up food stalls.

Ultimately, those working in the NTE will also need to remember that buzz is subjective. They will therefore need to work to manage the competing wishes of different groups within communities, to ensure that what feels exciting to one person does not feel threatening to another.

“One person’s buzz is another person’s problem brewing. I want to create a buzz until midnight and then I want to manage and dampen the buzz after midnight.”

– Public

WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT?

Ultimately, responsibility lies with individuals

There was a strong perception – shared by the public and stakeholders – that individuals should behave in a way that creates a safe and pleasant environment and which demonstrates respect for the community. Showing tolerance to those who come into city centres at night is a key part of this.

“It is 100% the responsibility of an individual to behave properly and treat people with respect.”

– Public



Tolerance is key:
It was agreed that individuals should demonstrate respect for the community

Local bodies will need to work in partnership to achieve a successful NTE

Despite the emphasis placed on individual responsibility, local government was seen to have ultimate oversight and ownership over the night-time economy.

Participants agreed that it has a responsibility to facilitate dialogue between different groups including local businesses, universities and residents.

National government should respect local wisdom and provide tangible support in the form of promoting best practice from around the country.

“[Getting the NTE to] work well is down to partnership working. The reason we work well together is that we tell each other when things are coming up.”

– Stakeholder



Partnerships are needed:
Dialogue between different groups and local government is needed to facilitate a successful NTE



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